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ABSTRACT

Interview questionnaires were used in a study to ascertain what benefits or positive changes in life styles, if any, are attributed to participation in the Adult Basic Education (ABE) program by ABE students, and to determine whether specific factors influence participation in ABE. The sample of 510 individuals was drawn from those individuals (in 10 selected West Virginia counties) who had received public assistance sometime during 1968-73 and who had attended but not completed public school. The sample was divided into two groups--a control group that had not participated in an ABE program and an experimental group that had participated in an ABE program. The experimental groups were further divided into those who had completed an ABE program and received a GED certificate and those who began but did not complete an ABE program. Study results indicated that ABE participation had little impact on the life styles of ABE students. There was evidence that the ABE program fails to meet the objective of those who enroll to learn to read and write. There was evidence that welfare agencies are the prime recruitment source of ABE students who receive public assistance. Some of the recommendations were that (1) the ABE program return to its original objective of emphasizing basic skills, (2) the student-teacher relationship in the ABE program be reevaluated if basic skills are to be emphasized, and (3) the ABE program recruit more males, minority groups, and older students. (TA)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations of the 309 Special Demonstration Project To Determine the Changes in Life Styles of Adult Basic Education Students Attributable To Participation in the Adult Basic Education Program.

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Marshall University
Huntington, West Virginia
April 1977

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THE PROBLEM

There is a lack of qualifiable data ascribing any benefits to adults who participate in the Adult Basic Education program. Therefore, the purposes of this study were: (1) to ascertain whether or not participants in the Adult Basic Education program ascribe any positive changes in their life styles to Adult Basic Education participation; and (2) to ascertain whether or not specific factors such as reasons for leaving the public school, recruitment sources, enrollment objectives, payment for attending, length of attendance, reasons for leaving the Adult Basic Education program, and demographic characteristics influence participation in the Adult Basic Education program.

This study is significant in that it seeks to ascertain whether or not benefits or positive changes in the life styles of Adult Basic Education students may be attributed to their participation in the Adult Basic Education program. If benefits are ascribed as a result of Adult Basic Education participation, several uses can be made of the data. The information about those benefits or positive changes can be developed, among other things, into useful techniques for recruiting students and gaining legislative and community support for the Adult Basic Education program.

OBJECTIVES

1. To determine whether or not positive changes occur in the life styles of adults who participate in the Adult Basic Education program as compared to adults who do not participate.

1.1 To determine whether or not ABE completers, ABE non-completers, and non-participants use selected reading, writing, and math skills in commonplace situations.

1.2 To determine the economic status of ABE completers, ABE non-completers, and non-participants.

1.3 To determine whether or not additional educational and/or training levels are attained by ABE completers, ABE non-completers, and non-participants.

1.4 To determine the employment status of ABE completers, ABE non-completers, and non-participants.

1.5 To determine the awareness by ABE completers, ABE non-completers, and non-participants of community agencies and services.

1.6 To determine whether or not ABE completers, ABE non-completers, and non-participants are involved in community activities.

2. To determine whether or not specific factors influence participation in Adult Basic Education.

2.1 To determine why ABE completers, ABE non-completers, and non-participants leave public schools.

2.2 To determine how ABE completers and ABE non-completers become aware of the Adult Basic Education program.

2.3 To determine why ABE completers and ABE non-completers enroll in the Adult Basic Education program.

2.4 To determine whether or not payment for attending the Adult Basic Education program influences the completion rate of ABE students.

2.5 To determine how long ABE completers and ABE non-completers attend the Adult Basic Education program.

2.6 To determine why ABE non-completers leave the Adult Basic Education program.

2.7 To determine the demographic characteristics, e.g. race, sex, and age of ABE completers, ABE non-completers, and non-participants.

PROCEDURES AND INSTRUMENT USED

Ten counties were selected in proportion to the rural and urban segments of the population in West Virginia. The population for the study consisted of all adults in these counties who had been on welfare during the period 1968-73 and who had not completed public school. A random sample of 510 names was drawn from this population. The sample was divided into two groups -- a control group that had not participated in an Adult Basic Education program and an experimental group that had participated in an Adult Basic Education program. The experimental group was further divided into two groups -- the ABE completers who had completed an Adult Basic Education program and received a G.E.D. certificate and the ABE non-completers who started but did not complete an Adult Basic Education program or receive a G.E.D. certificate.

Two versions of a questionnaire were developed to collect data concerning changes in the life styles of both the control and experimental groups. Both versions contained questions relating to the following categories: vital statistics, continuation of education, economic status, social attributes, selected reading, writing, and math abilities, and demographic characteristics. The experimental group's version contained additional questions pertaining to Adult Basic Education participation and recruitment. A pilot study was conducted to test the research instrument, the collection methods, and the treatment of the data. Necessary revisions of the research instrument were made.

Former Adult Basic Education students in the selected counties were trained by Marshall University staff in interview techniques that

emphasized the accuracy of data collection and the reduction of bias in the interview. The personal interviews conducted by these interviewers were voluntary on behalf of the respondents. In each instance, the questionnaire was read orally by the interviewer and voluntarily answered by the respondent. A total of 193 interviews was completed. This total included 67 ABE completers, 86 non-completers, and 40 non-participants. Forty of the interviews completed were checked to assure that they had been conducted.

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Chi square analysis was employed to ascertain the significance of the difference among data received from ABE completers, ABE non-completers, and non-participants. A .05 level of significance was selected.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The limitations of the study were as follows:

1. The study was an ex post facto design; therefore, any changes in the life styles of Adult Basic Education participants had already occurred.
2. The sample included only adults who were welfare recipients during the period of 1968-73.
3. Of the original sample of 510 adults, only 38% were located and consented to be interviewed.

ASSUMPTIONS

The assumptions made concerning the study were as follows:

1. The experimental and control groups were homogeneous.
2. Any changes in life styles would be determined with experimental and control groups obtained from 1968-73 records.
3. Less resistance to data collection and more objective responses would be probable if members of the target population were interviewers.
4. The sample was representative of the population.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Adult Basic Education (ABE). The Adult Education Act of 1966 defined Adult Basic Education as:

> ... education for adults whose inability to speak, read, or write the English language greatly impairs their ability to get or retain jobs commensurate with their real ability.[1]

Experimental Group. A group of persons who had participated in an Adult Basic Education program, who had been on welfare during the period 1968-73, and who had not completed public school.

Control Group. A group of persons who had never attended an Adult Basic Education program, who had been on welfare during the period 1968-73, and who had not completed public school. Both the control group and the experimental group were from the same population.

Participants. Members of the experimental group who had attended an Adult Basic Education program.

Non-participants. Members of the control group who had never attended an Adult Basic Education program.

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[1]Comptroller General of the United States. The Adult Basic Education Program: Progress in Reducing Illiteracy and Improvements Needed, a report prepared by the Office of Education (DHEW). Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1975. p.1.

ABE Completers. An experimental subgroup composed of persons who had completed an Adult Basic Education program and had received a G.E.D. certificate.

ABE Non-completers. An experimental subgroup composed of persons who had begun an Adult Basic Education program but had not completed it or received a G.E.D. certificate.

G.E.D. The General Educational Development Test.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

All respondents to this study were grouped according to their participation or non-participation in the Adult Basic Education program. All Adult Basic Education participants were then grouped according to their completion or non-completion of the Adult Basic Education program. The resultant groups were as follows: (1) Adult Basic Education completers, (2) Adult Basic Education non-completers, and (3) non-participants.

This study of benefits attributable to Adult Basic Education participation had two major objectives. This summary of findings was organized in regard to each of the study's objectives.

The first major objective was to determine whether or not positive changes occur in the life styles of adults who participate in the Adult Basic Education program as compared to adults who do not participate. Data were collected to determine whether or not the groups differed significantly in specific life style factors which were as follows:

1.1 To determine whether or not ABE completers, ABE non-completers, and non-participants use selected reading, writing, and math skills in commonplace situations.

1.2 To determine the economic status of ABE completers, ABE non-completers, and non-participants.

1.3 To determine whether or not additional educational and/or training levels are attained by ABE completers, ABE non-completers, and non-participants.

1.4 To determine the employment status of ABE completers, ABE non-completers, and non-participants.

1.5 To determine the awareness by ABE completers, ABE non-completers, and non-participants of community agencies and services.

1.6 To determine whether or not ABE completers, ABE non-completers, and non-participants are involved in community activities.

The findings were as follows:

1.1 To determine whether or not ABE completers, ABE non-completers, and non-participants use selected reading, writing, and math skills in commonplace situations.

Significant chi square values were observed in regard to the utilization of numerous reading, writing, and math skills in commonplace situations. ABE completers and non-participants were more likely to perform the following activities than ABE non-completers:

1. To read newspaper ads before shopping ($P. < .02$)
2. To read instructions ($P. < .0001$)
3. To read to others ($P. < .01$)
4. To read books ($P. < .0001$) and magazines ($P. < .0003$)
5. To use libraries and bookmobiles ($P. < .04$)
6. To use the yellow pages in the phone book ($P. < .0001$)
7. To use road maps when traveling ($P. < .0013$)
8. To use recipes ($P. < .001$)
9. To write a letter when necessary ($P. < .0001$)
10. To apply for credit cards ($P. < .004$)
11. To open a checking account ($P. < .02$)
12. To balance a checkbook ($P. < .001$)
13. To figure gas mileage ($P. < .03$)

However, ABE completers were more likely to perform the following activities than either non-participants or ABE non-completers:

1. To read the sports or women's page of the newspaper ($P. < .02$)
2. To use newspaper ads to find a job ($P. < .0007$)
3. To figure the interest on a loan ($P. < .01$)

1.2 To determine the economic status of ABE completers, ABE non-completers, and non-participants.

Significant chi square values were observed on the amount of wages earned per month ($P. < .02$) and the move to a newer residence ($P. < .05$). ABE completers were more likely to earn wages of $401.00 or more per month and to move to a newer residence than either non-participants or ABE non-completers.

A significant chi square value was observed on receiving welfare benefits after ABE participation ($P. < .04$). ABE completers were less likely to receive welfare benefits after ABE participation than ABE non-completers.

1.3 To determine whether or not additional educational and/or training levels are attained by ABE completers, ABE non-completers, and non-participants.

A significant chi square value was observed on the attainment of additional educational and/or training levels ($P. < .005$). ABE completers were more likely to attain additional educational and/or training levels than either non-participants or ABE non-completers.

A significant chi square value was observed on making plans for the future ($P. < .003$). ABE completers were more likely to make plans for the future than either non-participants or ABE non-completers.

A significant chi square value was observed on the increase of learning skills ($P. < .0006$). ABE completers were more likely to indicate an increase in learning skills (English, reading, and math) than either non-participants or ABE non-completers.

1.4 To determine the employment status of ABE completers, ABE non-completers, and non-participants.

A significant chi square value was observed on changes in jobs, promotions, and/or pay raises ($P. < .02$). ABE completers and non-participants were more likely to experience job changes, promotions, and/or pay raises than ABE non-completers.

A significant chi square value was observed on the present work situation ($P. < .05$). ABE completers were more likely to be full time workers than either non-participants or ABE non-completers.

A significant chi square value was observed on the skills gained in the ABE program improving the participant's chances of keeping a job ($P. < .0036$). ABE completers were more likely to indicate that the skills gained in the ABE program improved their chances of keeping a job than ABE non-completers.

A significant chi square value was observed on the reason ABE participants left their last job ($P. < .05$). ABE completers were more likely to leave their jobs because of child care and/or family problems than ABE non-completers.

1.5 To determine the awareness by ABE completers, ABE non-completers, and non-participants of community agencies and services.

A significant chi square value was observed on the ability to locate a clinic, doctor, or dentist ($P. < .03$). ABE completers and non-participants were more likely to be able to locate a clinic, doctor, or dentist than ABE non-completers.

1.6 To determine whether or not ABE completers, ABE non-completers, and non-participants are involved in community activities.

A significant chi square value was observed on feeling comfortable in groups of people ($P. < .03$). ABE completers were more likely to feel comfortable in groups of people than either non-participants or ABE non-completers.

The second major objective was to determine whether or not specific factors influence participation in Adult Basic Education. Data were collected to determine whether or not the groups differed significantly in regard to specific factors which were as follows:

2.1 To determine why ABE completers, ABE non-completers, and non-participants leave public schools.

2.2 To determine how ABE completers and ABE non-completers become aware of the Adult Basic Education program.

2.3 To determine why ABE completers and ABE non-completers enroll in the Adult Basic Education program.

2.4 To determine whether or not payment for attending the Adult Basic Education program influences the completion rate of ABE students.

2.5 To determine how long ABE completers and ABE non-completers attend the Adult Basic Education program.

2.6 To determine why ABE non-completers leave the Adult Basic Education program.

2.7 To determine the demographic characteristics, e.g. race, sex, and age of ABE completers, ABE non-completers, and non-participants.

The findings were as follows:

2.1 To determine why ABE completers, ABE non-completers, and non-participants leave public schools.

A significant chi square value was observed on leaving public school

due to pregnancy (P. < .02). ABE completers were more likely to leave school due to pregnancy than either non-participants or ABE non-completers.

A significant chi square value was observed on leaving public school due to an inability to read well (P. < .02). ABE non-completers were more likely to leave school due to an inability to read well than either ABE completers or non-participants.

Non-participants indicated more frequently that they left school due to a lack of interest than either ABE completers or ABE non-completers.

2.2 To determine how ABE completers and ABE non-completers become aware of the Adult Basic Education program.

Both ABE completers and ABE non-completers indicated welfare agencies as the most frequent source of recruitment for the Adult Basic Education program.

A significant chi square value was observed on being made aware of the Adult Basic Education program by relatives (P. < .05). ABE completers were more likely to hear about the Adult Basic Education program from relatives than ABE non-completers.

A significant chi square value was observed on recommending the Adult Basic Education program to others (P. < .005). ABE completers were more likely to recommend the Adult Basic Education program to others than ABE non-completers.

A significant chi square value was observed on recommending the program specifically to friends (P. < .02). ABE completers were more likely to recommend the Adult Basic Education program to friends than ABE non-completers.

2.3 To determine why ABE completers and ABE non-completers enroll in the Adult Basic Education program.

A significant chi square value was observed on enrolling in the Adult Basic Education program to take the G.E.D. Test ($P. < .0001$). ABE completers were more likely to enroll in the Adult Basic Education program to take the G.E.D. Test than ABE non-completers.

A significant chi square value was observed on enrolling in the Adult Basic Education program to learn to read and write ($P. < .0002$). ABE non-completers were more likely to enroll in the Adult Basic Education program to learn to read and write than ABE completers.

2.4 To determine whether or not payment for attending the Adult Basic Education program influences the completion rate of ABE students.

The chi square values observed on payment for attending the Adult Basic Education program and enrolling to receive some financial benefit were not significant for ABE participants.

2.5 To determine how long ABE completers and ABE non-completers attend the Adult Basic Education program.

The chi square values observed on length of attendance of the Adult Basic Education program in both hours per day and months per year were not significant for ABE participants.

2.6 To determine why ABE non-completers leave the Adult Basic Education program.

A significant chi square value was observed on leaving the Adult Basic Education program due to the center or class closing ($P. < .02$). ABE non-completers were more likely to leave the Adult Basic Education

program due to the center or class closing than ABE completers.

ABE non-completers indicated more frequently than ABE completers that they left the Adult Basic Education program due to administrative reasons -- the inaccessibility of the learning centers, the operating hours of the learning centers, and the absence of child care facilities.

2.7 To determine the demographic characteristics, e.g. race, sex, and age of ABE completers, ABE non-completers, and non-participants.

Frequency data indicated that the majority of the groups was white and under the age of 35 with a slightly higher percentage of ABE non-completers over the age of 35. Also, a greater percentage of ABE completers were female.

CONCLUSIONS

As a result of this study, it is concluded that:

1. There is little difference in positive life style changes between ABE completers and non-participants.
2. There is evidence of a difference between ABE completers and non-participants. ABE completers report making future plans, whereas non-participants report making none.
3. There is no evidence of positive life style changes by ABE non-completers.
4. There is evidence of a high rate of G.E.D. completion among those who enter the ABE program with relatively high levels of educational skills.
5. There is evidence of a high rate of ABE drop-outs among those who enter the ABE program with relatively low levels of educational skills.
6. There is evidence that the ABE program fails to meet the objective of those who enroll to learn to read and write.

7. There is evidence that welfare agencies are the prime recruitment source of ABE students who receive public assistance.

8. There is no relationship between the completion rate of ABE students and payment for attending the ABE program.

9. There is no relationship between the completion rate of ABE students and their length of attendance of the ABE program.

10. There is evidence that those who start but do not complete the ABE program leave due to administrative reasons.

11. G.E.D. completion is associated primarily with the white female population under the age of 35.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result of this study, it is recommended that:

1. The ABE program return to its original objective of emphasizing basic skills to eliminate the inability of adults in need of basic education to read and write.

2. The student-teacher relationship in the ABE program be re-evaluated if basic skills are to be emphasized. Also, specialist teachers in G.E.D. preparation and counseling should be provided for those who enter the ABE program with high levels of educational skills and seeking a G.E.D.

3. The ABE program's curriculum incorporate learning materials and experiences relevant to everyday situations for adults.

4. The ABE program recruit more males, minority groups, and older students in need of basic education. Also, former ABE students who started but did not complete an ABE program should be encouraged to return if the program reverts to a basic education emphasis.

5. This study be a continuing project. Therefore, it is suggested that contact with the persons interviewed in this project be maintained to measure differences, if any, among the three groups.